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Larry Downey is a "fiddler" & spoke highly of Jehile Kirkhuff.

Blind Eyes See Beauty In Music

By STEVE HAMBALEK

A one-time world champion fiddler now is a boarder on a farm, living on a \$105-a-month pension for the blind and scarcely little more.

He is 63-year-old Jehile Kirkhuff, of Lawton, Pa., who won the title of world champion fiddler in a competition at Crockett, Tex., in 1954.

Lawton is about 30 miles south of Endicott along Route 26 in New York and Route 267 in Pennsylvania.

Although he retired from fiddling about 12 years ago, Mr. Kirkhuff this year recorded for the Library of Congress three tapes of 122 tunes that he calls "old time music."

He said that he did it primarily to help young students who want to learn the traditional tunes of not only pioneer America but of the British Isles and some parts of Europe.

He has been legally blind since birth and asthmatic

since he was eight. Yet he is an articulate man with a sense of humor who laughs easily and often.

Of the fact that he never made big money at fiddling, even after he won the world championship, he says without bitterness:

"The earth is a bad planet. You set out to do something, but up there in the cosmos is a little man who will say, 'No you won't.'"

In the late 1920s, when he was doing well playing at square dances in such places as Earlville, Smyrna, North Norwich, New Berlin, Sidney, Afton, Bainbridge and Unadilla, he went back home to the farm because his father was too ill to work it.

He had many bands. Playing the first fiddle, he usually had a second fiddler and a pianist. He has played his fiddle on radio stations in Binghamton and Owego.

He said that Robert P. Christeson of Arlington, Va.,

asked him to make the tapes for the Library of Congress after he heard him play at the Old Fiddlers Picnic at Lenape, Chester County, Pa. The picnic attracts up to 40,000 persons on the first Saturday of August, he said.

He first went to Lenape in 1953 — "It's non-competitive but an honor to be invited" — and missed going back only in 1963 and this year.

He said a man named John W. Winans of Lemon Grove, Cal., has paid him a few hundred dollars for five tapes that contain 220 tunes.

The winning of the world championship meant a grand total in prizes of \$85.

The competition was in two categories, best fiddler and best band. Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Edwards, also of the Lawton area, were second fiddler and pianist, respectively.

The fiddler competition was in three classes, those 50 years of age and younger, Mr. Kirkhuff's class (he was 47); 50 to 75 years and, 75 and above.